

Learning to Work Through Dissension with Other Believers (Acts 15)

I. THE BACKGROUND (Acts 15:1-4)

A. The Type of Problem (1-2a) (DOCTRINE, discipline, differences)

☞ Principle: Conflict should not discourage us—it's normal.

B. The Response to the Problem (2b-4)

☞ PR: We should not always consider compromise as a valid option (doctrine).

☞ PR: NOT to "win", but to discover and yield to the truth.

II. THE DISSENSION (5)

The issue became personal, as believers of the Jerusalem church identified and struggled with the issue as well.

☞ PR: Recognize that we may have beliefs from our past that are incorrect.

☞ PR: If done in sincerity, no issue is wrong to bring up.

III. THE DISCUSSION (6-12)

A. The apostles and elders came together to consider this issue (6)

☞ PR: Input into conflict discussions should logically be limited to those who are qualified to speak on the matter.

B. There was much discussion [lit. investigation or question] (7a).

☞ PR: We must be willing to offer the sacrifice of involvement.

☞ PR: We are to speak one at a time, in an orderly fashion.

C. Peter speaks (7b-11).

☞ PR: We must be committed to our fellow believers as spiritual family.

☞ PR: We are to speak up (if we have cause), rather than become bitter.

☞ PR: We are to focus on the issue, and not argue by belittling others.

☞ PR: Our goal for this issue is to find a solution, not to assign blame.

☞ PR: We must communicate clearly, and confront error. (Col 3:16)

☞ PR: See admonition is a necessary element in Christian relationships.

☞ PR: We are not to bring up one's past. The issue is the issue.

D. Paul and Barnabas speak (12).

☞ PR: It is our privilege / responsibility to speak up with studied insight.

☞ PR: We must commit ourselves to truly listen as others speak.

E. James speaks (13-18).

☞ PR: We must conduct ourselves in an orderly manner, speaking in turn. (Should not be a problem if we're listening to one another).

☞ PR: God's plan for each of His established institutions always calls for a primary leader. The leader is: in the state—heads of government, in the home—the husband/father, in a local church the lead or senior pastor.

IV. THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH (14-18):

A. James focuses the discussion on the Scriptures.

☞ OB: James measures Peter's experience with the Word of God.

☞ PR: No matter who it is that speaks (James evaluated Peter, an apostle!), or what happens (v. 12), EACH testimony & experience MUST be weighed against Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17). Experience is NOT the final authority (e.g. charismatics, visions, or just plain "this happened to me"), but the Scriptures. Bottom Line: NOT who says it or what happened, but "What does (or doesn't) the Bible say?"

☞ PR: The actual issue must be identified before it can be resolved. Resolving the main issue resolves many others. (symptoms/illness?)

B. James identifies the truth _____ the Scriptures.

Acts 15:14-17 "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ "And **with this the words of the prophets agree**, just as it is written: ¹⁶ "After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; ¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, **Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name**, Says the LORD who does all these things. (Amos 9:11-12)

☞ Leaders must _____ the breadth of Scriptures!

V. THE DECISION (19-22):

A. James gives his _____ (19-21).

☞ OB: James, as the primary leader, gives his personal _____ regarding the issue, based upon his comparison with Scripture ("wherefore" – v. 19). Notice that he does not call for a vote on the matter, since the Bible clearly gave the answer to the problem at hand.

☞ PR: The leader is to lead when a _____ solution to the problem becomes evident. The leader is to summarize the Biblical solution. Since the Scriptures clearly answered the problem, no more discussion was needed. (There is a time when discussion comes from rebellion to the truth, rather than from the sincere search for it).

☞ PR: A majority _____ is often not appropriate, as the authority rests in Scripture, not in the group that has the most votes. If the Scripture clearly gives the answer, that IS the answer. This is again evidence of the Jerusalem church's goal to discover and yield to the truth. Their goal was not to make truth but to discover what the Bible truth was.

☞ PR: When the Scripture _____ the answer, the Scripture _____ the answer.

☞ OB: James, having stated the solution in the form of a _____, now applies it to the situation, making it practical, or better practice-able. His application of the Principle included consideration for those who were wrong, or in some way were affected by the outcome (20-21). The Gentile believers did not have to be circumcised, according to the Bible, but it was appropriate for them to "abstain" from practices which would be culturally offensive to the Jews (with the exception of fornication, which may have warranted an extra reminder, or may have related to close marriages). This consideration of others is also a Biblical truth: consideration of weak [NOT legalistic] believers —Romans 15:1; consideration of unbelievers – 1 Corinthians 9:18-27).

☞ PR: We must not only _____ the answer to a problem, but we must also appropriate the answer, and that with consideration for all affected.